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A
S E R M O N

Preached at the
VISITATION
OF THE

Right Reverend Father in God
JOHN L^d. Bishop of *London*,

Held in the
Parish-Church of *St. Sepulchre*,
NOVEMBER. 10. 1719.

By JAMES KNIGHT, D. D.
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L O N D O N: Ⓟ

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DEUT. xvii. 12.

And the Man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the Priest (that standeth to minister there before the Lord thy God) or unto the Judge, even that Man shall die: and thou shalt put away the Evil from Israel.

PROVISION was made in the Text I have chosen to prevent Divisions in the *Jewish Church*. The Context supposes it might so happen, that the * Elders of Cities or Persons appointed to instruct the People in the knowledge of the Law, and decide Controversies, might differ in the † Sense and Interpretation of it, or want Skill to determine the Cause or resolve the Difficulty proposed to them. In which Cases it was not fitting that the People should be left to their own

* *Rash*, on Ver. 8.

† *Mish. de Syned. c. 10. §. 2. & Not. Maimon.*

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Sentiments, which might probably lead the but a
into dangerous Errours, and Breaches of teach
Law; nor that every Elder, Doctour, and which
Judge should be suffered to define, interpret were
and decide, as seemed best to his own Jud and I
ment; since such a Liberty could prod shall n
nothing but continual † Strife and publ shew t
Confusion. For which Reasons when fr the M
difficulties and difference of Opinion happ hearke
ed to arise, the Elders and Judges were d (that
liged to refer them, if the lesser Assembl that M
proved insufficient, to the Judgment an Evil j
Decision of the great *Sanhedrin*, or Suprem To
Court and Council of the Nation, consistin and t
of the wisest || and most learned Men of the Dispe
Levites and others in the Law of *Moses*. *
there arise a Matter too hard for thee in Judgment Fir
— *thou shalt arise*, says the Context, and i
thee up into the place which the Lord thy G v
shall choose; and thou shalt come unto the Pri Sec
the *Levites*, and unto the † Judge that shall t
in those Days, and enquire; and they shall sho Thi
thee the Sentence of Judgment; which the Coun c
cil did by declaring the Tradition in such Ca a
ses; or, where that failed, by grounding their Fir
Sentence on Conclusions drawn from the ions
Law of *Moses*. And when such Sentences of Cl
was given in Matters of great Importance of Cl
the Elder or Elders who would not submit accou

† §. 3. Not. *Maimon*.

|| *Coccej*. Not. in c. 1. §. 6. * Ver. 8. 9.

† The *Sanhedrin*. בעל השורר

* C
† V

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but arrogantly and obstinately continued to teach and practice the contrary, or That which was agreeable to their own Opinion, were to suffer * Death for their Presumption and Disobedience. As it is written, † *Thou shalt not decline from the Sentence which they shall shew thee, to the right hand nor to the left. And the Man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the Priest, — or unto the Judge, (that is, the Sanhedrin or Council, v. 9.) even that Man shall die: and thou shalt put away the Evil from Israel,*

To apply this to the State of the Church, and the Government of it in the Christian Dispensation, I shall shew

First, That diversity of Opinions will arise in relation to the Doctrines of Christ as well as of Moses.

Secondly, The proper Method to prevent the Consequences of such a diversity.

Thirdly, The Punishment they are worthy of, who will not submit in Humility and Peace to the foresaid Method.

First, I shall shew that diversity of Opinions will arise in relation to the Doctrines of Christ, as well as of Moses. And first on account of the Style of Scripture, which tho'

* Cap. 10. §. 3. *Nor. Maimon.* §. 1. *Strangling.*

† Ver. 11, 12.

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written in a Language which a People understand, yet in certain Passages may be subject to the Controversies which sometimes arise concerning the meaning of human Expressions; and is yet more difficult in regard of those, whose Language, Education, and Customs are different. For the same Words are frequently used in different Senses, and the same Sentence will sometimes admit of different Constructions; the consideration of which may give an occasion to variety of Interpretations, and diversity of Opinions grounded upon them. And besides this, Disputes may arise concerning the Extent and Obligation of Rules and Precepts of the Gospel, which are sometimes delivered in general Terms, and sometimes in particular.

But secondly, the Corruptions of Men are another cause of diversity of Sentiment in Matters of Religion. And these may be reduced to the following Heads;

First, Covetousness. The desire of Happiness planted in all Men prompts the Generality to reward those with Temporal Blessings who pretend to teach them in Sincerity and Truth the means of obtaining it. This disposition gives an occasion to base Minds, that are set on the World, to contrive ways of procuring an Interest in the Esteem of such, which not succeeding in the common Method of instructing their Brethren in the Doctrine and Discipline of the Gospel of Christ

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which others may teach with more Understanding and better Success; They find fault with established Doctrines, or approved Conclusions; They pretend a Zeal for their Neighbour's Soul, whom they hope to draw to the desired Advantage from; and by confirming their Discourses to the Weaknesses and Corruptions of those that hear them, they carry their point with the Ignorant and Unreasonable. *There are many unruly and vain Talkers and Deceivers, says St. Paul, * especially they of the circumcision: whose Mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole Houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.*

A second Cause are the Lusts of Men. For when once they are resolved to gratify These, and yet would be thought to act upon just and reasonable Principles, they discard the old which will not be serviceable, and embrace Opinions that allow their Pleasures, and yet as they hope will guard their Reputation. *There are certain Men crept in unawares, says St. Jude, † who were before of old retained to this Condemnation, ungodly Men, turning the Grace of our God into Lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.*

A third Cause of variety of Opinions is Prejudice and Envy. This was the Case of

* *TIMOTHY I. 10, 11.*
† *VER. 4.*

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some of the first of the *Jewish* Converts, who long accustomed to the Rites and Institutions of their own Law, and bred in the Opinion of the perpetuity of it to the Day of Judgment, and envying St. Paul the Success of his Doctrine among the *Gentiles*, preached the necessity of observing the Law together with Faith in Christ crucified; and by this means destroyed the Gospel which themselves pretended to believe and recommend. Certain Men, says St. Luke, * *which came down from Judea, taught the Brethren, and said, except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved*, whom St. Paul calls † *false Apostles, deceitful Workers, transforming themselves into the Apostles of Christ*.

A fourth Cause is Pride and Ambition. Some are uneasy in every Condition that does not set them at the Head of Affairs. They would rule their Brethren before they are capable of governing themselves. They would have the Reputation of Men of great and uncommon Talents, tho' the chiefest ground of such their Pretension may be little more than their boundless Ambition. They scorn to go in the Track of others, and cannot endure, thro' a wrong Opinion of their own Judgment, that the Doctrines they teach, should be scanned by those, whom they

* *Acts* 15. 1.

† *2 Cor.* 11. 13. compared with *v.* 4. and *Gal.* 1. 7. 8. 9.

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judge inferiour to themselves in Knowledge. Their great Assurance, or want of Modesty, passes with many for a sure Argument of the goodness of the Cause they are pleased to espouse, and so boldly defend; and is a good reason to prevail with Men, who cannot submit to the uneasy Task of looking and searching into the bottom of Things. Thus they are advanced to the Post they desire, but not to the Honours of the wise and virtuous; for the Authority they have gained, being founded on the Ignorance and Weaknesses of Men, is no glory but reproach to them; and they become the object of scorn of the discerning, which can never be ballanced with the vain Applauses of the blind and deluded. *Diotrephes*, says *St. John*, * *who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.* This proud Elder, who loved to be first in the Church of God, oppos'd with Contempt the Apostle of Christ, and rejected the Brethren recommended by him, because it is probable that the Doctrine they taught, was not conformable in every particular to his own Scheme; and he cast out those from Communion with the Church, who were more regardful of the Authority of Christ lodged in his Apostle, than moved with his vain and ill-grounded Threats. And *St. Paul* says of the Authours

* 3 Ep. v 2.

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and Publishers of false Doctrines, * *If a Man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome Words, even the Words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the Doctrine which is according to Godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing.*

These which I have mentioned are some of the noted and obvious Causes of diversity of Opinions in Matters of Religion, to which may be added these few following, Want of Application, or impatience of Mind to search curiously and exactly into Things; The love of Novelty, or desire of striking out something new; An undecent undervaluing of other Mens Talents; and a slowness to apprehend and determine aright in Matters of Religion, howsoever acute, and what ever Proficients they may otherwise be. These Truths of a different and inferiour Nature. With these Indispositions either Men will take up with the surface of Things, and the first Impressions, and believe themselves wise without the drudgery of *searching for Knowledge as for hid Treasures*; † Or lose the Substance in pursuing the Shadows of their own Imagination; Or reject the help of their Understandings might receive from the Labours of others, that were honoured in their Times for the greatness of their Talents, their Skill to use them, and the Grace

* 1 Tim. 6. 3, 4.

† Prov. 2. 4.

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God enlightning and conducting them :
condemn That for Superstition and Fan-
which they cannot immediately and
sufficiently discern thro' their *slowness of*
not to believe all that Christ, the Apostles,
and Prophets have spoken.

From what has been said it evidently ap-
pears, that so long as Truth is expressed in
words, there is probable Ground for differ-
ence in Judgment ; and so long as the Vices
and Passions of Men, with other defects and
 Disorders of Soul, are predominant in them,
there are certain Seeds of Division and Strife,
which will bring forth their deadly and de-
structive Fruits in their proper Season.

The Persons most capable of disturbing
the Peace and Unity of the Church with
variety of Opinions, are the Pastours of it ;
whose Profession obliging them to search in-
to the depths of the Oracles of God, have
opportunities thereby, if they be not sub-
dued and purified by Grace, to pervert
Scripture, and turn That which was ap-
pointed to Life, to their own Destruction
and the ruin of others. *Of your own selves,* says
Paul * to the Elders of the Church, *shall*
men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw a-
way Disciples after them. The Opinion con-
victed of their Learning, Integrity, and due

* Acts 20. 17, 30.

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Concern for the Welfare of the Church, who whose Unity and Peace it is kindly presumed they would not destroy for trifling Reasons, much less for gross and pernicious Errours; and the Authority they have gained with their respective Flocks, together with their Pretensions to the love of Truth and a Zeal for God, and the Good of Mankind, put it in their power to spread Doctrines with the greater success; among those especially, whose Minds are prepared thro' some hidden Corruption for Error and Delusion. For the Sins of the People are doubtless a cause of the Rise and Progress of false Teachers, the Scripture assuring us, that God deals with confirmed sinners according to the state and desire of their Souls; as for Instance, * when the People wept and murmured for Flesh, he sent them Quails that gratified their Lust, but spread Infection and Death thro' the Camp. And in like manner when Men are abandoned to the pleasures of Sense, their Minds infected with the love of Novelty and averseness to the Truth, and their Consciences hardened with habitual sinning, they are more properly consigned, thro' the just Judgment of Almighty God, to the hands of false and designing Teachers, Men according to their own Hearts, who will plead for the Sins and

* *Numb.* 11.

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justify the Principles they practise and avow; y^e it is written, * For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a Lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the Truth, but had pleasure in Unrighteousness.

The proper Method to prevent the Consequences of diversity of Opinions in Matters of Religion, is that which I shall consider in the

Second Place. † If there arise a Matter too hard for thee in Judgment, — then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place, which the Lord thy God shall choose; and thou shalt come to the Priests the Levites, and unto the Judge that shall be in those Days and enquire; and they shall shew thee the Sentence of Judgment. And thou shalt do according to the Sentence which they of that place (which the Lord shall choose) shall shew thee. This was the Rule laid down by the Law to preserve Uniformity in the Jewish Church, or at least to banish public Disputes and the Occasions of them; the Elder or Teacher was to submit his own Judgment to the Judgment of the Council or great Sanhedrin, and acquiesce in it. And what more prudent and effectual Method can possibly be taken to preserve the Peace of the Church of Christ, and the Purity of Doctrine committed to it? If Difficulties arise, or

* 2 Thess. 2. 11, 12.
Dens. 17. 8, 9, 10.

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one or more of the Doctours of the Church embrace Notions, and accordingly publish them apparently different from the established Doctrines, is it not just that in such Cases the Cause should be referred to the Fathers of the Church, his Equals or Superiours in Order and Authority, nor perhaps inferiour in any Accomplishment? For if God's Grace, and the Knowledge of the Truth be presumed in one, the same Grace and the same Knowledge, at least in kind if not in degree, may also be supposed, till the contrary plainly and undoubtedly appear, in every Pastour and Bishop of the Church. For God's Grace is given to Men according to their Wants, and moral Dispositions: But the Wants are the same in the Pastours of the Church of the same Order. From whence it will follow, that being alike adorned with the common Virtues of their Christian Profession, they will be like Partakers of the same Grace and Knowledge of the Truth, like Witnesses of the Doctrines of the Gospel (an allowance being made for Natural Talents) and on that account fit to be appealed to in the important Matters of our Christian Faith. In Points of difficulty, who must be consulted to declare Law but the Learned Judges the Interpreters of it, whom contending Parties ought to submit to notwithstanding the Opinion of private Council? And the like Course is equally necessary

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in other Professions, where the power of Judging is committed to chosen and experienced Persons. And shall That be accounted an unfit means to maintain Truth and Peace in the Church, which is the established method of preserving Justice in public Societies, of promoting the End and Interest of the less, and the Order, Peace, and Reputa- tion of them both. And This was in fact the practice of the Church at the very beginning. For St. Luke tells us, that a Dispute arose in the Church of *Antioch* concerning Circumcision, which some Convert Jews would impose as necessary on the believing Gentiles; * *Except ye be circumcised, ye cannot be saved.* This sort of Doctrine was warmly opposed by *Barnabas* and *Paul*, who maintained the Truth and Liberty of the Gospel. But the conclusion was this, that the Matter should be referred to the Decision of the Apostles and Elders at *Jerusalem*. They determined, says † St. Luke, that *Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the Apostles and Elders about this Question.* St. Paul doubtless was well satisfy'd of the Truth of the Doctrine he had long taught, and was now defending; for || *He neither received it of Man, neither*

* *Acts* 15. 1.
† Ver. 2.

|| *Gal.* 1. 32.

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was he taught it, but by the Revelation of Jesus the Christ. But to satisfy the Jews, as is very probable, who according to the Rule laid down in the Law, had appealed to the Apostles and Elders at Jerusalem, the only Sanhedrin that was now appointed to determine of Controversies in Matters of Religion; and to adopt the Practice of the Jewish Church, and set an Example to future Ages of the Gospel proper means to preserve Peace and Unity in the Christian; and further, to procure a public and authentic Testimony to the Truth of the Doctrine he had taught the Gentiles, from Persons guided by the same Spirit; and above all, to perform the Command he had received from God, to go to Jerusalem on this occasion, he submitted the Controversy which was now on foot, and the Gospel he preached, to the Decision and Censure of the Apostles and Elders assembled in Council. * *I went up, says he, by Revelation, and communicated unto them that Gospel, which he Scr* preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of Reputation, lest by any means when it should run, or had run in vain. The good Apostle proposed his Doctrine, first in private to the chief Apostles, and then to the Church assembled in Council. And this Example afterwards followed both in † East and West

* Gal. 2. 2.

† Tertull. de Jejun. c. 13. Euseb. Lib. 5. c. 23, Mart. Cave's Hist. Lit. Vol. 2. p. 39, 40. 41.

of Jesus the next Age as well as the succeeding,
 is very Councils meeting as Heresies arose, or di-
 versity of Opinions, to condemn and suppress
 the Apostem. The Consequence of which is, that
 ly saw early and ready a concurrence of Chur-
 termines of distant Countries in the same Practice,
 ; and as either the effect of Conclusions drawn
 Church from a Precept of Christ laid down in the
 of the Gospel ; or of Apostolic Tradition commit-
 United to the Bishops of all Churches, for the
 procure better Government of their respective Dio-
 Trinites, and the Church in general ; or at least,
 Gentile the effect of a general Sense of the necessity
 it ; and following the Apostles Example in like
 he has cases ; for in such Assemblies every Bishop
 on the appeared as a Witness for his own Diocess,
 rovers the Doctrines received by Tradition from
 spel his Ancestours, and, for ought he knew,
 sure without any change from the Times of the
 Counpostles, (for we suppose them Men of In-
 on, integrity and Conscience,) and in what Sense
 which the Scripture was interpreted and delivered
 to them ; a Work easy in those early Times,
 means when the Helps were great, the Tradition
 good meth, and the Grace of God abounded in
 private Church. To which Tradition the Fa-
 Churchers appealed in their Disputes with He-
 ple writers ; *Should a Dispute arise about a small*
and We

Matter, says * Irenaus, ought we not to have recourse to the most Ancient Churches which the Apostles conversed in, and receive That from them which is certain and clear in relation to the Point at present in dispute. And again he † says, that by this Method they put those to shame, who either out of Self-will, or vain Glory, or for want of Understanding, are by reason of a perverted and corrupt Mind, have inferred Doctrines, otherwise than they ought or held separate and unlawful Assemblies. He reasons if no such Doctrines as were then advanced had been ever taught in the Christian Churches; or such Interpretations never given of the Sacred Writings; or such Opinions never grounded on such Interpretations, they might well conclude, that the Doctrines and Interpretations were not the Gift of the Spirit of God, but a private Opinion; my meaning is this, if they could be reduced to the Analogy of Faith, or

* Quid enim? & si quibus de aliquâ modicâ questione disceptatio esset, nonne oporteret in antiquissimas currere Ecclesias, in quibus Apostoli conversati sunt, ab eis de presenti questione sumere quod certum & liquidum est. *Lib. 3. c. 4.*

† Eam quam habet (scilicet Romæ fundata & confirmata Ecclesia) ab Apostolis traditionem, & annunciatam omnibus fidem, per successiones Episcoporum perventam usque ad nos indicantes, confundimus omnes eos, quoquomodo vel per sui placentiam malam, vel vanam gloriam, vel per cacitatem & malam sententiam, præterquam oportet colligunt. *Lib. 3. c. 3.*

tradidit

dicted the Doctrines already received and
 which established in the Church. For it could not
 That supposed that the Churches of God had
 been always destitute of a necessary Branch
 and age Divine Truth, or so soon could have lost
 they put But some may object, that the Chan-
 self-will, is are foul, and Truth is corrupted by its
 ding, and descent thro' many Generations; and
 Mind, appeal to Synods in the present Age, is to
 they oppose Truth to the Censure of Men that
 lies. Be ready to suppress it. But what if a
 advanced Church has cast off the Traditions and Al-
 Christifications of Men, and reformed its Do-
 ns new by the Standard of Scripture, ac-
 such Obedience to the Sense universally received in
 interpret first and purer Ages of the Gospel? To
 that stand to the Decisions of this Church, is to
 re no submit our own to the Doctrine and Judg-
 vate Sent of the Churches of Christ in the purer
 could times, as preserved and declared in their
 a, or confession of Faith. Or put case, that there
 no Church, but what is corrupted in cer-
 in Particulars, yet to stand to their Deci-
 in Points of Doctrine which are no
 quiffima part of their present Corruptions, but be-
 ati sunt, ved of old to be taught by the Apostles
 certum & found in their Writings, is to remit the
 & confite dispute to the Judgment and Decision of the
 nciatam, earned and Judicious of the first Ages, who
 n perven were able Witnesses of the Doctrines of their
 nes est, ancefours, and the customary Interpretations
 vanam gl of the Holy Scripture. Thus to pro-
 eterquan nounce

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nounce Sentence upon modern Opinions, relating to the Nature and Dignity of Christianity according to the Creed composed and approved in the Council of *Nice*, is not imputing Popish Corruptions on the Minds of Men for primitive Doctrines, but opposing the Truth as taught and received in the first Ages to such Opinions as are inconsistent with it.

The Text I have chosen shews it was the Duty in the *Jewish* Church to refer their Disputes to the Judgment of the *Sanhedrim* or Great Council; and the necessity or expediency of such a method in the Church of Christ was declared in the Practice of the Church of *Antioch*, which submitted the Point which was then in dispute to the Judgment of the Apostles and Elders at *Jerusalem*; and the Command which was given by God himself to the Apostle of the *Gentiles* to go up to *Jerusalem* on this occasion, made it his Duty to submit his Doctrine to the same Authority. Since such-like Disputes would probably arise in after-Generations, the like method could be no less useful for the Times to come than the first Age; and since old Opinions, which were early condemned, are revived and propagated, what can be fitter to preserve Peace, than to determine the Point, that is controverted now, by the very Council which decided it then.

* which

* Vit.

* Spa

ions, which consisted of Persons venerable for
 F Christianity, who could not be supposed to corrupt
 and the Truths received from their Ancestours;
 not invulnerable for their Learning, and on that
 Minds account acquainted with the Writings of the
 opposi Doctors of the Church in the Times before
 the first, as well as skilled in the Holy Scri-
 onfistures; venerable for Age, who could bear
 witness from their own Knowledge to the
 was Doctrines taught in their respective Diocesses
 for them Time past, which the Memory of few
 anhed could reach but their own; and grave, se-
 y or erious and judicious Men, that had Patience
 church and Ability to penetrate to the bottom of
 e of the Things before them, and Courage to
 ted thassert and maintain the Truth, they were
 to the well assured of; who were not removed
 s at above two Ages and a little more from the
 was past of the Apostles, and cannot be suppo-
 of used to have wanted the true and Apostolic
 is occ Doctrines of the Object of their Faith. To
 his these it becomes us to make our Appeal in
 ce the Controversies relating to the Nature and
 arise Person of the Son of God, as able Witnesses
 ould of the mind of Scripture, and the common
 ne the Traditions and Doctrines of the Church.
 , which Nay our own Church obliges its Clergy
 revive to teach nothing as Matter of Faith but

* *Vit. Const.* Lib. 3. c. 9. *Sozom.* Lib. 1. c. 17.

† *Spar. Collect. of Can.* 1684. P. 237.

what

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what is agreeable to the Holy Scriptures, and what Catholick Fathers and Ancient Bishops have deduced from them.

Thirdly and lastly, I shall consider the Punishment denounced against Those, who will not submit in Humility and Peace to the foresaid Method of deciding Controversies. According to the Law the presumptuous Elder, which opposed his own to the Judgment of the *Sanhedrin*, or Great Council, was to be put to Death. The Man, * *that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the Priest (that standeth to minister there before the Lord thy God) or unto the Judge, even that Man shall die.* If he did not teach and encourage others to believe and practise, or did not practise contrary himself to the Judgment of the Council, he did not incur the Punishment of Death, notwithstanding he retained his former Opinion; for the Peace of the Church being not broken by diversity of Opinions and difference in Practice, he was left to himself and the Judge of all things, who knows the Secrets of every Heart, and who they are, that are Objects of Mercy, or ripe for Justice. But the proud Elder, who would not submit, but act in opposition to the public Wisdom, was to suffer Death, that the Scandal

* *Deut.* 17. 12.

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might be removed, and others taught to be modest and obedient. * *Even that Man shall die: and thou shalt put away the Evil from Israel; and all the People shall hear and fear, and do no more presumptuously.* And so black and heinous was this sort of Sin in the Christian Dispensation, a Dispensation of Mercy, Pardon, and Peace, that the worst of Punishments was denounced against those, who would not submit to the Sentence of the Council assembled at Jerusalem; that is, who preached to the Gentiles the necessity of Circumcision, notwithstanding the contrary Decision of the Church; † *Though we, says St. Paul of such Teachers, as an Angel from Heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any Man preach any other Gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed.* He speaks it twice, to shew the certainty of the Judgment he denounces. And again, in the same Epistle he says, || *He that troubles you, shall bear his Judgment, whosoever he be: And, * I would they were even cut off which trouble you.* For what are Decrees without a power to punish the Disobedient? If Men will not, or cannot

* Ver. 12, 13.

† Galat. 1. 8, 9.

|| Chap. 5. 10.

* Ver. 12. compared with Ver. 2, 7, 11.

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act upon such Occasions, the Cause will devolve upon God alone, * who will doubtless maintain his own Institutions; and it is well for the Offender, if the weight of his Punishment do not encrease according to the Power of him who inflicts it. If then all Controversies in Matters of Religion ought to be determined, as I have already shewn, by the joint Sentiments and concurrent Testimony of the Fathers of the Church, learned in the Doctrines of the Christian Profession as grounded in Scripture, and received from their Predecessors; and if the Established Church, of which we are Members, stands to the Decision of the first great and general Council gathered at *Nice*, † the First-fruits and Glory of the Christian Clergy, who brought their Doctrine from every Quarter of the known World; and that at a Time when it cannot be supposed that the Truth could fail in the major part of the Churches of Christ, and the Scars were fresh of the last Persecution, a fiery Trial, that Providence sends to refine the Soul, and establish the Sufferers in the Grace of God and the Truth of Religion; I say, if the Doctrine of our Church in relation to Christ

* *Levit.* 20. 4, 5.

† *Vit. Const.* lib. 3. c. 7.

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built upon this ancient and surest Foundation the Word of God, as taught and explained in the Doctrines of the Antients; with what reason ought we to adhere to this Orthodox Church, which endeavours to preserve Uniformity and Peace by the same Method which God himself prescribed to the Jews, and which was afterwards adopted in the Christian Church, by the like practice of the Apostles themselves, and observed and continued in after-Ages? And how can we answer it to our own Souls, neglecting this strong and universal Evidence, we follow the guidance of a private spirit teaching and acting in opposition to Doctrines approved and established for so many Generations?

The Text supposes that *Presumption* or *Pride* is the Cause of Disobedience to public Decisions; from whence it appears, that the best Disposition to maintain Truth, and secure the Reverence due to Superiours, is *Meekness* of Spirit. For as the *Psalmist* says, * *The Meek will be guided in Judgment, and the Meek will be taught his way.* The meek Man will not lean to his own Understanding, nor join himself to those || who despise Dominion, and speak evil of Dignities; who first desert the

* *Psa.* 25. 9.

† *Prov.* 3. 5.

|| *Jude* 8.

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Doctrines of the Church, and in consequence of it fly in the face of the Father of it. Whatsoever Perswasion he may inwardly have of the Truth of a Doctrine, contrary to that which is generally received, yet he is not forward to trouble the Church by making it public, being not assured that the Knowledge of a Truth infers an Obligation to publish it to the World, without the Evidences of a special Call. And therefore he chooseth to use and improve it as a private Talent, which he well knoweth God may bestow by the secret Operation of his Holy Spirit, on other Pastours and Doctours of the Church as well as himself, and by such an inward and undiscerned Progress prepare their Minds for the Time of Enquiry, when the Cause of Truth may be publickly asserted with Approbation and Success, and the Heats, Schisms and Scandal avoided, that are found to attend unseasonable Attempts towards public Reformation. And by this Conduct he leaves the Business of Reforming and correcting in proper Hands, which God hath intrusted with it; he does not usurp the Office and Power he has no right to, nor destroy Charity which unites and Edifies, on account of Knowledge which perhaps may be found to puff up and destroy. And since it appears that there are other Vices besides Pride, that discom-

N. *A Visitation* SERMON. 27

to console the Mind for discerning Truth or
 Father adhering to it, it is further necessary that
 may in the Soul be purged from the Contagion of
 Doctrine these, that serving God in Simplicity and
 receive purity, and retaining Truth according to
 Church the Light already received, and conform-
 ed thing its Behaviour to the measure of its
 in Oblivion, it may thus be fitted for grea-
 withouter Accessions of Divine Grace, and more
 An exalted Talents; and be qualified to judge
 prove of a Doctrine proposed, from the Analo-
 knowy it bears to the Truths it has received
 operat and been long accustomed to. For, says
 urs an Christ, * *If any Man will do God's Will, he*
himself shall know of the Doctrine whether it be of
discerne God, or whether I speak of my self. After
 e Timeall, if there be any Difficulty that may
 Truth yet perplex us thro' the weakness of our
 approb Mind, and the Sublimity of the Doctrines
 Schism proposed to it, Let us wait with a patient
 d to attend peaceable Spirit, till it please God to
 ls pub reveal it to us: Or, in the Apostle's Style,
 duct be *If in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God*
 and Counsell reveal even this unto you; nevertheless,
 od ha hereto we have already attained, let us walk
 urp an the same Rule, let us mind the same thing.

* John 7. 17. † Philip. 3. 15, 16.

F I N I S.

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